

*The University of Chicago*

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ADJUSTMENT OF MISSIONARIES'  
CHILDREN IN AMERICA

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FAC-  
ULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN  
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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ROBERT L. FLEMING

Missionary to India

Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church

### THE PROBLEM

The subject of the adjustment of missionaries' children in America has been one of concern to officials connected with mission boards for some time. In 1936 a conference was held in New York City, attended by about twenty persons representing eight mission boards. This group seemed to feel that 'breaks in health' and 'serious maladjustment' were above average for the children of missionaries compared with the general population. Evidence was drawn from observations in some cases where 'missionary' children could not calmly face situations in which they found themselves and therefore ran away from them or became resentful, estranged and 'anti-missionary' in their attitudes. Reasons for poor adjustment were suggested as stemming from such causes as economic pressure, a sense of loneliness, religious emotional over-stimulation and social backgrounds which were foreign to American patterns of life.

The purpose of this research was to discover factors which affected the adjustment of eighty-eight India 'missionary' children who came to the United States to live. Two or three earlier studies indirectly related to this subject. Ellsworth Huntington and Leon F. Whitney in their book, *The Builders of America*,<sup>1</sup> made a study of the graduates in several Yale classes among whom were a small number of missionaries' sons. They pointed out the exceptional occupational success which these individuals had attained, and accounted for it because of the rigorous process of selection which both parents experienced before they were accepted by their mission board. Dan B. Brummitt in a cursory study found that missionaries' children had good health records, were cosmopolitan in their interests and had an excellent education. Allen E. Parker's Master's thesis in the Divinity School at

\* Based on a Doctor's dissertation at the University of Chicago.

<sup>1</sup> Ellsworth Huntington and Leon F. Whitney. *The Builders of America*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1927.



the University of Chicago, dealt with India 'missionary' childrens' evaluation of their experiences at Woodstock School in the town of Mussoorie, United Provinces, North India. The present study takes students from that same school and follows them through the transitional period when they left India and came to America, on through college and graduate school into vocations and married life, in an attempt to discover the problems which confronted them and how they met these.

#### THE BACKGROUND: WOODSTOCK SCHOOL

There are two private boarding schools for American missionaries' children in India—one in the South and one in the North. Woodstock School is the one in the Himalayan mountains one hundred fifty miles north of Delhi. The school was founded almost a hundred years ago for Anglo-Indian girls. Since 1874 it had been under the direction of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. until it became a union institution in 1923. Six other American Protestant churches now work with the Presbyterians at Woodstock, the school having become primarily an institution for American missionaries' children. From 1933 to 1943 the enrollment averaged about four hundred, of whom almost two-thirds were American and one-third Indian and British. Grades ranged from kindergarten through high school.

The teaching staff numbers about twenty-five, more than half of whom were Americans. The curriculum, textbooks and extra-curricular activities have now become largely American. From 1929 to 1938 approximately one hundred sixty American students attended Woodstock High School, many of whom graduated there. It was from this group that the study population for this research was taken.

#### SELECTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY OF POPULATION

From 1939 to 1946 the writer obtained biographical statements from the parents of these one hundred sixty students. A total of ninety-eight statements were secured before returning to this country and two others were added later. The selection, then, was at random, and consisted of the first one hundred statements it was possible to get. When the check-lists were sent out in 1946, two of the one hundred had lost their lives in the war and three were not located. Eighty-eight returned their check-lists

in time to be included in the study; two others came too late; five did not reply.

Of the eighty-eight, sixty-two graduated from Woodstock High School, eighteen finished high school in America, and eight went directly into college without completing four full years of high school. Among the group were forty-six men and forty-two women.

All were missionaries' children. The total represented the following denominations: twenty-eight Methodists, twenty-eight Presbyterians in U.S.A., eleven United Presbyterians of North America, six Baptists, four Reformed Presbyterians, three Evangelical and Reformed, three Brethren, two Mennonites, one Disciples, one Assemblies of God, and one Faith Mission.

These students attended Woodstock from two to twelve years—the average being six and a half years. They came from six Provinces in India and from Burma. Seventeen traveled over one thousand miles to reach Woodstock and the average distance for the whole group was about two hundred seventy-five miles. The distribution as to classes throughout the ten-year period was fairly even, though there were a few more Americans in the later classes.

All eighty-eight went to college and attended some eighty-five different institutions. At present they hold one hundred twelve degrees. Sixteen of them were still in college or graduate school in 1946. Only four so far have dropped out without a degree—one in the third year, two after the third year, and one in the fourth year of college.

Of the eighty-eight, seventy-five are married, twelve are single and one is divorced. About the same number, seventy-five, felt that they were in the vocation of their choice, whether the professions, other occupations or housewives. Geographically this population is now widely scattered throughout the United States; some are living in Hawaii, China, Columbia, France, India and Syria. Seven of the group expect to accept mission board appointments within the next two years.

#### THE PHYSICAL AREA

The health of this group was rather closely guarded in India. However, eighteen had had malaria, twelve typhoid and eleven dysentery, along with ten other diseases not included among the



common childhood diseases. At least six siblings of the forty-nine families represented died in childhood and one died in adolescence. On the whole, the health records were good. When they arrived in America, some of the number spoke with an accent. Others did not have the right kind of clothing. Sex education has been meager, for only twenty-four felt that they had had enough knowledge when they came to America. They had been somewhat sheltered in India and the transition to the United States presented a rather sharp change. Most of the group had adequate information on sex after two or three years in college.

#### THE ACADEMIC AREA

Factors which helped to determine the choice of a college were: (1) parents or siblings had been there, (2) scholarships were secured, and (3) the standing of the institution was high. Almost all the group felt that they would get through college. Seven were elected to Phi Beta Kappa while eleven others were also among the top ten per cent of their class. Scholastically, fifty-five were placed above average by their colleges and twenty-one were below average. So far they hold seventy-eight academic degrees and twenty-nine graduate degrees, eleven of which are Doctor of Medicine. Thus the academic record for the group was outstanding.

#### THE SOCIAL AREA

Most of the group were at home in adult company. They were used to meeting strangers and had been able to carry on an intelligent conversation at quite an early age. Recreation was largely of an active or constructive type such as tennis, badminton, cycling, handicrafts, or reading. None of the twenty-eight interviewed mentioned attendance at moving picture theatres as a winter holiday activity.

These students had two homes; one was in or near Woodstock School and the other was the place where their parents lived. They were early separated from their parents for several months at a time when they went to school in the hills and avoided the heat of the plains. Over half of them had been away from home by nine years of age. This seemed to cause them to become



independent of their parents quite early though they retained a deep affection for them.

Social life at Woodstock was largely communal. There was a tendency to separate the sexes so that heterosexual relations were often postponed until coming to America. Most of this group felt intellectually superior to their peers in the United States, but they often felt uncertain in their social contacts, especially with individuals. Therefore many in this group did not enter into many social activities the first few months in college. Many also refused to accept some American social practices such as dating, dancing, smoking, and drinking. A smaller number dated and danced from the first. All were conservative in smoking and drinking. Better peer relations seemed to develop with the growth of a tolerant attitude toward the social practices of others.

Seventy-six have married; the average age at marriage was about twenty-five years. The pattern of mate selection was similar for both men and women; neither the husbands nor the wives as a group were educationally as well prepared as those in this study population. The bases on which mates were selected indicated that practically all of the group expected to marry 'for life.'

These individuals came from religious homes where through high school they engaged in regular worship services. They had had Scripture classes every year at Woodstock so that the Bible was not an unfamiliar book. Church observances fell off during college attendance, but tended to be renewed after college. Almost all the group favored trends toward inter-denominational coöperation. They retained many of their earlier Christian principles. Most appeared to have a deep respect for the work of their parents on the mission field but were inclined to favor educational, medical and agricultural work more than the program of direct evangelism.

Most of the group continued with their interests in current events in other countries with a result that international affairs often were as important as national issues. Many of this group did not believe in war as a method of settling world problems, but took part in the war when it came. Of the forty-six men, two were missionaries abroad during the war, three were ministers, and four were in C.P.S. camps; the rest were in the armed

forces or were doing essential war work. Contacts with racial and ethnic groups were friendly. Discrimination against Negroes in this country shocked most of this population. Few displayed little or any racial discrimination, although some felt that they were being influenced by propaganda.

#### THE ECONOMIC AREA

There was little chance for missionary children to earn money in India for what little they might have done threw them into competition with an adult Indian who could feed an entire family on a few cents a day. Financial responsibility often began on their trip to America. Almost all worked in college on the average of twelve hours a week for board or board and room. They also accepted summer jobs which brought in some money and provided a helpful work experience. Some were not through college nor graduate school when the war interrupted their education for about two years. The benefits received under the G.I. Bill brought several back to college.

Parents thought that their children were usually careful with their money; some of them had been too frugal. Financial matters were frequently reviewed in letters.

About three-fourths of the group have chosen their vocations. It is too early to determine the degree of success they have had, though most of them felt that they had been successful and that they liked the jobs they now hold.

This summary serves to give some idea of the development which has taken place over a number of years in the physical, academic, social and economic areas.

#### CONSTRUCTION OF INSTRUMENTS USED

The 'interview' was planned in order to check some of the information gathered in the biographical statements and to discover factors affecting adjustment which might not have been revealed from other sources. Two trial interviews were held and the outline was revised. Thirty more interviews were completed throughout 1946. It was evident that this was a valuable source of basic information needed in the study.

The 'check-list' for the study population was drawn up and sent to ninety-five persons whose addresses were known. At this time, also, an evaluation of all possible responses was made



by a small group of experts. As the check-lists were returned, responses were changed into scores. A second check-list was constructed and sent to a number of close friends of a few of the population in order that a statement might be obtained from neutral sources.

Finally a 'brief form' was made on which to place the academic records for all the group as recorded by the colleges and graduate schools attended. By means of these instruments it was possible to assemble a good deal of information about a single individual.

#### RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Current thinking among Americans in India as well as among people in this country indicated the hypotheses that certain factors would produce conditions for better adjustment than would others. The following were some of these hypotheses:

- 1) Individuals who chose professional vocations would adjust better than those who chose non-professional vocations.
- 2) Individuals in this population would adjust better in a small college than in a large one.
- 3) Individuals from a more liberal religious background would adjust better than those from a conservative one.
- 4) Individuals who finished at Woodstock after 1934 would adjust better than those who finished before 1934.
- 5) Individuals who were in the boarding department a great deal would adjust better than those who were not.
- 6) Individuals who graduated at Woodstock would adjust better than those who did not graduate.
- 7) Younger siblings would adjust better than older siblings.

By comparing average scores it was possible to test these hypotheses. For each hypothesis the total population was broken into two groups and the mean scores for both earlier years and for the present time were compared. No reliable statistical difference was found for any of the seven hypotheses as stated. One table is given for the first hypothesis as an illustration of the difference between the mean scores. In this example the mean scores were greater than in the other six comparisons.

In the statistical treatment of the second hypothesis dealing with the size of college attended, a comparison was also made of the means of the nine subscores from which the total score was

TABLE I.—COMPARISON OF MEAN IN PROFESSIONAL AND NON-PROFESSIONAL VOCATIONS

| Total Score                  | 1946                       |                                | 1930-1940                  |                                |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                              | Profes-<br>sional<br>Group | Non-pro-<br>fessional<br>Group | Profes-<br>sional<br>Group | Non-pro-<br>fessional<br>Group |
| 420-429.....                 |                            |                                |                            | 3                              |
| 410-419.....                 |                            |                                | 1                          | 1                              |
| 400-409.....                 |                            |                                | 2                          | 2                              |
| 390-399.....                 | 1                          |                                | 3                          | 2                              |
| 380-389.....                 |                            | 5                              | 5                          | 5                              |
| 370-379.....                 | 2                          | 2                              | 1                          | 4                              |
| 360-369.....                 | 1                          | 1                              |                            | 1                              |
| 350-359.....                 | 5                          | 3                              | 2                          |                                |
| 340-349.....                 | 4                          | 1                              | 3                          | 3                              |
| 330-339.....                 | 1                          | 3                              | 1                          |                                |
| 320-329.....                 | 1                          | 2                              | 2                          |                                |
| 310-319.....                 | 3                          | 2                              | 2                          | 1                              |
| 300-309.....                 | 1                          | 2                              |                            |                                |
| 290-299.....                 | 2                          | 1                              |                            |                                |
| 280-289.....                 | 1                          |                                |                            |                                |
| Total.....                   | 22                         | 22                             | 22                         | 22                             |
| Mean.....                    | 338.14                     | 346.77                         | 366.32                     | 382.68                         |
| Standard Devia-<br>tion..... | 28.37                      | 29.38                          | 30.84                      | 27.90                          |
| t.....                       | 0.97                       |                                | 1.80                       |                                |

derived. Items making up the subscores were grouped under the headings of physical, intellectual, social-adult, social-peer, national and international, religious, racial, economic and self-areas. The statistical analysis showed that there was no significant difference between those attending a large or small college in any of the nine areas. As a further check on this hypothesis, a comparison was made of the means of the differences of scores for 1930-1940 and 1946 for those attending a large or small college. The means were almost identical.



By rewording the sixth hypothesis to compare those who graduated from Woodstock with those who were left by their parents in the United States to finish high school, a small significant difference was found. For the earlier years the *t* score was 2.28 and for the present time, 3.05. Individuals who graduated from Woodstock seemed to be making a better adjustment than were those who were left in America to finish high school.

A final check on the seventh hypothesis involving twenty-five paired siblings was made by comparing the difference between the scores of the older and younger siblings for earlier years and for the present time. Critical ratio were obtained of  $-.42$  and  $1.86$ ; these figures were statistically insignificant.

The statistical treatment of check-list responses in this study revealed: (1) that the spread of scores was similar and the mean scores were alike for all pairs of groups, (2) that the hypotheses were apparently not valid although based on current thinking and (3) that factors affecting adjustment lay deeper and would have to be found through other approaches.

#### CASE STUDIES

In the study of the individual all available data were assembled and used in a framework similar to that formulated by the Committee on Human Development in the Department of Education at the University of Chicago. It was now possible so to relate this material as to reveal certain factors which were operating and which affected the adjustment of persons in this group.

The selection of cases was first based upon the interviews—only the thirty-two individuals interviewed were considered. The second criterion used was the rank in the check-list scores both for the first years in America and for the present time. Total scores for each person for the first years varied from 320 to 468 and for 1946, from 280 to 395. All those whose scores fell both times within the upper or the lower quartile were chosen; there were five in the first group and four in the second. A further basis of selection was the amount of change in the two scores. Two more persons were chosen because they showed large favorable changes. Finally, two others were also included on the basis that certain factors operated in their background which did not seem to be typical of most of the group. Thus a

total of thirteen individuals made up the studies. This number was too small to be representative of the whole group; therefore it was possible only to suggest that certain factors of adjustment in the lives of these individuals might characterize that of the entire group. These suggestions were as follows:

In the 'physical area' indications were that this population had a good heritage; their health records were good. Physical difficulties such as poor adjustment because of a rapid growth spurt and the gaining of weight due to a metabolic upset and to a sense of loneliness and insecurity, would have occurred in any like group. Lack of sex education appeared to be temporary because many of the group early established satisfactory marital relationships within the bonds of marriage.

In the 'intellectual area' this group was superior, due to a rich home environment, adequate academic preparation, travel and an intimate knowledge of the language and patterns of another culture.

Adjustment in the 'social area' appeared to concern this population a great deal. A majority appeared to succeed better in group activities with peers than with individuals. Most of them were fairly conservative in their social practices. It was too soon to evaluate the success of this group, but one might suggest that the stress experienced in adjusting socially may have been a benefit and that conservative practices were more often an ultimate advantage than a disadvantage.

Attitudes and practices were noted in regard to religion, race and national-international relations. The religious point of view of many tended to broaden and practices to become more liberal. Numbers of the group expressed appreciation of the work of their parents and one of the mission programs abroad. In regard to racism, the group were inclusive. They displayed little race prejudice toward Negroes, Jewish people or other ethnic groups. The principle of including all peoples in a Christian fellowship carried over in this country. In the national-international area most of this population were cosmopolitan in their interests, partly because some of their classmates lived in other countries and also because quite a few of the parents were still in India.

Adjustment in the 'economic area' showed that these individuals were usually thrifty and even frugal in their handling of money. Most of them were awarded scholarships and worked



during college days. Some felt at a disadvantage when it came to economic competition for they did not have a pull because of 'inside' friends; they had to go largely on their own merit. It was too soon to determine what degree of vocational success this group has had. Most of them enjoyed their present occupation.

#### CONCLUSIONS

In the light of this study a more adequate answer may now be given to the issue raised by the New York Committee as to how missionaries' children adjust in America. As far as persons from Woodstock School are concerned, most of them neither ran away from difficult situations nor became resentful, estranged or anti-missionary in their attitudes. Most of them were just the opposite—they saw difficult situations through, they had a deep affection for their parents and their work, and almost twenty per cent of them are already in mission work or expect to be within the next few years.

In a number of respects this group of eighty-eight missionaries' children proved to be a superior lot. That seventy-eight of the eighty-eight already have their Bachelor's degree is an enviable record. Their academic achievement was well above the average for a sixth of them were elected to membership in Phi Beta Kappa or were in the upper ten per cent of their classes. Among the seventy-six already married there was only one divorce, for almost all this group hope to marry 'for life.' They have worked out excellent bases upon which to set up their homes. Members of this group often implement their attitudes on religion, race relationships and international affairs by active participation in one or all of these areas.

This study suggests why members of this group have adjusted so well. Factors such as attending a smaller or a larger college, coming from a more liberal or conservative religious background, choosing a vocation in the professions or outside of them, the position of the person in the sibling pattern—these and others proved to be superficial factors in the adjustment of these individuals to American life.

There probably were deeper influences at work in the development of persons in this study group. Among these were (1) a good heritage, (2) a happy home, (3) intimate contacts with both parents in most cases until college, (4) experience in a boarding

school with its give and take and early periods of separation from the family group, (5) creative rather than commercialized amusements, (6) the practice of thrift and a work experience, (7) continued contact with classical music through concerts, violin and piano playing, (8) extensive travel in foreign countries, and (9) an intimate contact with a culture different from that found in America. This combination of experiences helped to develop exceptional individuals.

Implications arising from this research include the following: (1) Some factors of adjustment were deeper than were reached by this study and probably lay in the early influences of the home. (2) The staff and administration of a boarding school have an excellent opportunity to study the child in his peer group and to assist him to develop into a well-integrated personality. (3) Extra-curricular activities are an excellent means through which to develop wholesome social relationships. (4) The home of the missionary child is a place where a sense of responsibility can be developed in spite of the presence of servants. The home can afford occasions for the discussion of important subjects including sex and marriage which will provide knowledge the individual feels he needs. The environment of the missionary home on the plains of India can provide opportunity for the evaluation of various phases of Indian culture as well as a chance to observe and make collections in the field of natural history. (5) Woodstock students may enjoy particular advantages which have aided them to adjust better than missionary children from other countries and backgrounds—an hypothesis which should be tested by further research.











